The Last Tree

by

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Part I:
Tired humanity.

Chapter I:

A gated community.

A grey stationary cloud does not want to pour a single drop of rain on a gated community which is composed of three five-story buildings that are far two modern and ordinary to move anybody or anything. I would not say it is an ugly place, but when one lives in Normandy, one expects to live in a house that proudly displays its brown beams and white plaster facades. A blackbird digs a hole in a flowerbed with its beak in order to find worms; an old lady makes it leave. An old man sees the scene; he says hello to the old lady, who tells him that those wicked birds keep damaging the flowers. There are so many old people here. Where are the young? There must be a few children. I remember having seen some, in summer, playing ball in the swimming pool, although

it was strictly forbidden, for old people do not like this kind of juvenile restlessness. Perhaps the old's habits have made the young flee.

By the by, it's May, the temperatures are high, and there are only three people in the swimming pool. They don't look to one another. Two of them swim. The other doesn't: he leans his head against the edge of the pool and looks in the distance. The three of them are locked up in their ivory tours. This is group loneliness. They get out of the water at the same time using three different ladders. They all lay on their towels underneath the scorching sun, remaining silent. They have been living here for years and they don't even utter the banalities which make people feel that they belong to a community whose members like one another. The grey cloud disappears into thin air. The sky is perfectly blue now. It does not resemble the skies I used to see when I was young. As to the temperature, it is far too high; it is around 32º C, and

it’s just the beginning of May. Rouen is turning into Sevilla!

The naughty bird keeps on digging holes in the flowerbeds. Let’s follow it. It eats a few worms and heads toward the river, for there is a river that flows through this gated community. It is called the Robec. It is not a French word; it is Norwegian. It means the red river, not because it was stained with the blood of the French whom the Normans slaughtered when they conquered this land, but because it is always muddy when it rains. A few yellow irises are blooming. There are lots of aquatic plants in the water. A moorhen hides behind the reeds; two ducks look at me; some trouts swim upstream. This abundance of water does not cease to amaze me. When I lived in Andalusia, I witnessed the agony of a brook. All the fishes and frogs perished; all the chameleons dried up. I hope this won’t happen here.

The two ducks get out of the water. They cross the car park and pass by the cherry tree and the apple

tree. They stop, turn their heads, look up and see that neither the cherries nor the apples are ripe. They continue on their way and reach a pear tree that bears no fruit. Behind this tree, there is a small garden that is much different from all the gardens of the gated community: it is overcrowded with plants. It is so quiet! The shutters are closed and covered with a lot of dust, which shows that once, a long time ago, someone lived there. It is he or she who planted all those marvels. In Normandy, May always bestows myriads of evanescent flowers upon the blushing nature. The hellebores and primroses are still in bloom, whereas the red blanket flowers, next to the iron bench, are starting to bloom. The laurustinus bows to the lazy feijoia, which has just awakened. A rose bush called Line Renaud exhibits some delicately scented blowers that are trying to bewitch some honey bees. The ducks merrily cross this fence of flowers that separates ugliness from comeliness in order to draw near to a kind of wall of periwinkles

that embellish the foot of a magnificent tangerine tree.

They sit in front of it. Are they expecting it to drop its fruit? I don't know, but there are so many tangerines on it that one might fall. It is a bit weird: it is covered with fruit and flowers at the same time. Actually, this shows that nobody picked them. Hence, nobody lives there anymore, and nobody dares to visit this garden. Those ducks and other birds, I suppose, are the only worshipers of this magnificent tree. The honey bees ignore the Line Renaud roses and land on the beguiling white flowers of that tree, which fill the air with an intoxication fragrance that reminds me of my Andalusian orange tree. I hope you won't dry up like it. The soil around your trunk is not moist. Someone should water you. A tangerine falls to the ground. A duck tries to eat it. This sense of déjà vu is overwhelming.

Chapter II:

Which name do you bear?

A twelve-year-old boy lives in the flat that overlooks this garden. He is raised by his mother… Has he ever met his father? His place is impersonal: the walls and furniture are white, and the floors are beige. The lad opens the window of his bedroom. He gazes at the mesmerizing garden. He can smell the tangerine blossom.

Chinotto- Hey, boy!
Kevin- Who is calling me?
Chinotto- It is I, bellow.
Kevin-There's nobody bellow.
Chinotto- If there is nobody, who am I?

The tangerine tree moves its branches.

Kevin- What are you?

Chinotto- A tangerine tree, of course.

Kevin- Tangerine trees don't speak.

Chinotto- I do.

Kevin- You did not speak before.

Chinotto- Because I did not feel like speaking.

Kevin- I did not know that plants could speak.

Chinotto- All plants can speak, but they rarely do so because very few humans understand them, which is why they keep trampling on them.

Kevin- Why have you decided to speak to me today?

Chinotto- Because there is an emergency… I am thirsty. Please, water me. The man who lived here has disappeared. Nobody takes care of us now. Come here and water us. There is plenty of water in the Robec.

The boy takes two plastic buckets, goes downstairs, draws water from the river, walks past the cherry tree, the apple tree and the pear tree, and

gets closer to the tangerine tree. He pours a bucketful of water on the shallow root system of the plant.

Chinotto- Thank you, boy. If you had not helped me, I would have had to drop my flowers and a part of my foliage. It has not rained a lot this year, and tangerine trees are always thirsty. By the way, which name do you bear?

Kevin- I don't understand what you said.

Chinotto- What's your name?

Kevin- My name is Kevin, and yours?

Chinotto- I am Chinotto the tangerine tree. How do you do?

Kevin- Nice to meet you.

Chinotto- Please, Kevin, water the other plant that cannot stand drought.

Kevin- Which one is it?

Chinotto- the feijoia over there.

Kevin waters the subtropical bush, which bows to him in order to thank him. It does not utter a single word because it does only speak a kind of Portuguese. The other plants turn their leaves to the boy and smile like leaves do: they shiver. All the buds open, for the plants are relieved: if it does not rain, the boy will water them.

Chinotto- You seem worried, don't you?

Kevin- The world is not on track.

Chinotto- But it still spins: the sun rises and sets every day.

Kevin- I mean that the world is messy.

Chinotto- You see, in this garden, we never hear of mankind's restlessness. I have just noted that the weather is getting drier and drier.

Kevin- It's because of what they call "global warming."

Chinotto- What do you mean?

Kevin- Mankind's activities have released a lot of carbon dioxide into the air, which has warmed up the whole planet.

Chinotto- Men can fix that problem easily: they can stop behaving as they do.

Kevin- They don't want to do that, and the situation is getting worse. They are insane.

Chinotto- You are the only human I know, and you don't seem insane. Do you mean that all the other persons are crazy?

Kevin- I guess so. At school, we keep speaking of that problem, but the adults don't do anything. The young protest in the streets, but the politicians do nothing and keep on talking. They make decisions that do not prevent the temperatures from rising, for the population keeps growing. The world is overcrowded. If we want to produce food, we need energy, and the energy we use releases vast quantities of carbon dioxide into the air.

Chinotto- There is clean energy: water, the wind, the sun and… muscles! A short while ago, you watered me without using an electric pump.

Kevin- You are a wise man.

Chinotto- I am not a man. All tangerine trees are females, for they bear fruit.

Kevin- That's logical.

Chinotto- Isn't it?

Kevin- I must leave you now; I must do my homework.

Chinotto- Will you come tomorrow? Do you like tangerine?

Kevin- Yes, I do, madam.

Chinotto- Pick one. If you like its taste, I will give you more tomorrow. All the birds that dwell in this garden love them.

Kevin- Thank you, madam.

Chinotto- It is I who thank you, Kevin.

Kevin- So, see you tomorrow.

Chinotto- I will be delighted to see you tomorrow. Don't forget your buckets, for theses Mediterranean plants also need a few drops of that precious liquid. By the by, don't tell anybody that you spoke to me. They might regard you as a lunatic. You know, when lunatics start to regard sane people as lunatics, they grow violent, for they fear the truth.

Chapter III:

This is not the garden of the Finzi-Continis?

This garden does not resemble the garden of the Finzi-Continis, for the barbarity of the outside world does not enter it. Mankind is heading for its disappearance, poverty increases, desertification is gaining momentum, natural resources diminish, people starve, there are lots of riots, revolutions, and wars, but Chino's garden seems to ignore this apocalypse.

It is 3 o’clock in the afternoon and Kevin opens his bedroom’s window. He won’t do his homework, for he is in a bad mood because of the news. In fact, Russia and Europe are at war: the Russians have been raining bombs on Berlin since this morning and the French have already drop a nuclear bomb on Moscow. The Third World War is on the way. Kevin picks up the plastic buckets, go downstairs, draws water from the

Robec, walks past the three fruit trees and reaches the haven.

Chinotto- Good afternoon, Kevin. I am happy to see you again.

Kevin- Good afternoon, Chinotto. I have taken the buckets. Which plants must I water today?

Chinotto- Start with the primroses. Then water the lavenders and the helichrysum. Don't overwater them: they are Mediterranean plants.

Kevin- I am going to water them, but I don't know whether it will be useful.

Chinotto- Why wouldn't it be useful?

Kevin- Because their future and mine is uncertain.

Chinotto- You seem worried, Kevin.

Kevin- The French have dropped an atomic bomb on Moscow.

Chinotto- What's an atomic bomb?

Kevin- It's a thingummy that explodes, kills people and destroys everything around it.

Chinotto- Does it kill plants?

Kevin- It kills everything, including plants!

Chinotto- This is unfair: plants are innocent creatures. Some of them are dangerous because they are poisonous, but if you don't eat them, they are harmless. There are no wicked plants; even brambles and rose bushes are nice creatures. They just don't like to see people steal their flowers or fruit. Anyway, man can destroy them, but their seeds will germinate, and the area will soon be colonized by them.

Kevin- It won't happen.

Chinotto- Why?

Kevin- Because of radioactivity.

Chinotto- What is radioactivity?

Kevin- It's a thingummy than burns the flesh of people, animal and plants. You don't see it, but it burns and kills you. Some organisms survive, but they become monsters.

Chinotto- I have never seen monster plants. Some plants are ugly, but they are not monsters. Your

species must be really wicked, for it has created a diabolical weapon.

Kevin- All adults are wicked.

Chinotto- Aren't there good ones who educate their children in order to turn them into individuals who will be better than most human beings?

Kevin- Our teachers are supposed to be good people, but they keep lying to us. Yesterday, they told us that France would not go to war, and today it has nuked Moscow.

Chinotto- I am not referring to teachers. I know that their duty is to manipulate the young so that the regime may survive. You have parents; I guess they show you what reality is.

Kevin- I have no father. It is my mother who raises me.

Chinotto- Does she teach you how to perceive reality as it is?

Kevin- Not really.

Chinotto- What kind of mother is she?

Kevin- I assume that she wants me to become what my father never was.

Chinotto- At least she does not want you to become what she failed to be.

Kevin- How can I perceive reality as it is?

Chinotto- First, you must not have preconceived ideas about anything. Then you must observe Nature. It is she who makes you understand what truth is. I guess that humans call that objectivity.

Kevin- Can you give an example?

Chinotto- Yes, of course. For instance, look at these periwinkles. There are five of them along the wall. How do you proceed in order to discover whether they like shade or not?

Kevin- First, I try to evaluate the sunlight above them.

Chinotto- How can you do that?

Kevin- I look at the sun and at my watch and soon can tell you how long they have got sunlight during a certain day, and I do the same thing at different moments during the year.

Chinotto- So, what can you infer from what you see here?

Kevin- I infer that the periwinkle over there likes shade, whereas this one grows well in partial shade.

Chinotto- You are right. You are a true scientist. Your intelligence guided by Nature has enabled you to discover the truth. I would even say that you are a reasonable boy, almost a wise one. Now, look at me. Do I like shade or not?

Kevin- That's an easy question. Your branches grow in the direction of the sunlight. So, you don't really like shade.

Chinotto- Kevin, you are astute.

Part II:

Your hell is here

and now.

Chapter I:

A summer in hell.

Summer arrived. It was hotter than ever. In the hottest places on earth, the temperatures reached 68º C. People kept dying. Almost all the rivers dried up. That's what happened to the Nile. The artery that seemed immortal shrank under the anguished gaze of the Great Sphinx of Giza. The ageless monuments of Egypt, which had witnessed the birth of mankind, said their farewells to the insane creature and covered their stone bodies with the sand that entombed all the plants and animals that could not flee from this disaster.

There was still a bit of water in the Robec, but there were no more fishes, for its temperature was so high that they had all died. Kevin kept on watering Chinotto and the other plants of the garden. The forest around Rouen had burned; so had all the

forests in the word. The whole planet was covered with the ashes of the trees. Chinotto was certainly the last tangerine tree alive, and the plants around it were probably the last plants alive. What would humans eat now?

Chinotto- Kevin, I am thirsty: pour a bit more water on my roots.
Kevin- I am thirsty too. The temperatures are so high.
Chinotto- I don't know why the summer is so hot.
Kevin- All the forests have burned.
Chinotto- There are no more trees around Rouen, but there must be some elsewhere.
Kevin- No, all the forests in the world have burned. That's why there is always that strange smell in the air.
Chinotto- I don't have a nose; I cannot smell things, but I can see: there are lots of fumes.

The two ducks get closer to them, sit underneath Chinotto's branches and look at the last

tangerine that is ripe. Kevin picks it, peels it and gives it to them.

Kevin- They are starving.

Chinotto- So are you. You are so slim.

Kevin- There are not so many things to eat nowadays.

Chinotto- What do you eat every day?

Kevin- Canned food.

Chinotto- What will you do when there is no more canned food?

Kevin- There will always be some, for most people have died. In the supermarket, there are lots of cans and no more customers to purchase them. You know, now I don't need my wallet when I do shopping!

Chinotto- But you need fresh food because of vitamin C. You should grow vegetables. Are there seed packets in this supermarket?

Kevin- Yes, they sell seeds of tomatoes, carrots, salads, turnips, radishes...

Chinotto- Fine; take all the packets. You'll see that they can grow rapidly.

Kevin- Where will I plant the seeds? There's no room here.

Chinotto- In my neighbor's garden. Her backyard is huge and there is enough shade to prevent the vegetables from burning. You will give her some in order to thank her. Go and see her right away. Just knock at that window.

…

Kevin- Chinotto?

Chinotto- Yes, Kevin.

Kevin- I guess there is nobody. She may have left like all the others.

Chinotto- I saw her yesterday… and she has no car. Knock at the window again.

Kevin- She is not answering. I should go inside.

Chinotto- What's that noise?

Kevin- I have broken the windowpane.

…

Chinotto- Kevin, what's happening?

…

Kevin- Chinotto?

Chinotto- Yes, Kevin.

Kevin- I won't have to ask permission to plow her piece of land.

Chinotto- Why?

Kevin- Because she is dead. I assume that she died of a heart attack because of the heat.

Kevin buried the old lady underneath the pear tree. The rose bush offered him a few flowers; he set them upon the grave. There was no ceremony, but once Kevin had retired to his flat, the flowers began to sing the song of the deceased lonely hearts. The silver moon illumined this part of the garden. Then it began

to rain. The ducks sheltered under the apple tree. When man abandons man, Nature cries over him.

Chapter II:

The great migrations.

The world is in disarray. Since there are no more cars in working order and people don't extract oil anymore, the inhabitants of the warmest parts of the world try to oppose their fate by fleeing to colder places. Endless lines of haggard specters head for the nearest harbours. They will go to lands that were covered with ice not so long ago.

Some Australians try to flee to the Arctic. When their ship reaches this continent, the enthusiasm of the cold seekers turns into despair, for the plains they see are solitudes upon which nothing grows. The white desert is a kind of arid Sahara. All the water from the ice cap has flowed into the sea, and there are no lakes left. They are doomed to die of thirst if they don't dig a few wells. They might find fresh water. Unlike those who boarded a certain spaceship in

order to live a better life on planet Mars, they might find some where they are. That being said, it seems that the grass is not greener on the other side, for there is no more grass anywhere.

Kevin- I watched the news today.

Chinotto- What did they say?

Kevin- They said that five wealthy men boarded a spaceship bound for planet Mars.

Chinotto- What do they expect to find on planet Mars?

Kevin- Water, I suppose.

Chinotto- Has anybody ever found water over there?

Kevin- No, there were several expeditions, but they never found water.

Chinotto- Is there an atmosphere on Mars?

Kevin- Not really.

Chinotto- How can they grow plants without water or an atmosphere?

Kevin- I don’t know.

Chinotto- I can assure you that this planet will be their graveyard.

Kevin- Chinotto, are there other planets that resemble ours in the universe?

Chinotto- I don't think so.

Kevin- At night, I often look at the sky. There are so many stars. There must be other planets that are inhabited by living things.

Chinotto- I always look at the sky at night, and it seems to me that the universe has just begun to exist. Planet earth is a kind of introduction to something else. Thought has turned ideas into matter, and this is not the only aim of this gigantic system.

Kevin- Why does all this exist?

Chinotto- I don't know.

Kevin- Who could tell us why the universe exists and why we exist? … Nature?

Chinotto- Nature never explains anything. It is up to us to discover everything by means of reason.

Kevin- I find all this overwhelming.

Chinotto- It is, indeed.

Kevin- If we had the answer, we would know what to do now.

Chinotto- I don't think so. Existence is a quest that ends in partial ignorance. Have you got the seeds?

Kevin- Yes, I have.

Chinotto- Did you plow the piece of land this morning?

Kevin- Yes, I did.

Chinotto- So you can sow them now. Start with the peas, they don't need manure. They will grow easily.

Kevin- I have a few sprouted potatoes. Can I plant them next to the peas?

Chinotto- Is the soil sandy?

Kevin- Yes, it is.

Chinotto- So you can plant them. The bulbs will be big and they will nourish you. It takes only three months to grow them, and they don't need a lot of water. As for the beetroots...

Kevin- I hate beetroots.

Chinotto- So plant turnip seeds.

Kevin- I don't like turnips.

Chinotto- What do you like?

Kevin- I like carrots and tomatoes.

Chinotto- It's easy to grow carrots. You sow the seeds, and they grow. As for tomatoes, it is a bit difficult, for they need fertilizer and water, but you must not water the foliage because of mildew.

Kevin- I have a bit of fertilizer. There was a packet left in the supermarket.

Chinotto- Put a handful of it around each seed you plant. Then sow the salad seeds. In five months' time, you'll eat delicious salad. You won't starve anymore, Kevin.

Chapter III:

The last war.

Two years elapsed. Kevin lived on the vegetables he grew in the garden of Chinotto's late neighbor. The temperatures had stabilized, but the humans who had survived the climate chaos did not want to deal with their new living conditions in a sensible way and create societies based on reason. So they kept killing one another. It was a strange war: a primitive one, a silent one. In ruined cities or in deserts, a man killed another man in order to rob him of an apple or a piece of candy. A few days later, the murderer was killed by someone who stole the piece of candy he had saved in order to live a little longer. It was a fight against oneself, against one's own stupidity.

Almost all the inhabitants of the gated community had died or gone away. Nobody knows

what happened to Kevin's mother, but she does not live there anymore. In fact, Kevin is the last human being who lives there. As for the plants, they have survived: the boy keeps on watering them.

Kevin- Chinotto, there is not much water in the Robec.

Chinotto- It has not rained a lot this year.

Kevin- The last time it rained, it was eight months ago, and it did not rain a lot: five millimeters at most.

Chinotto- Are there places in the world where it rains more than here?

Kevin- Where the temperatures and the atmospheric pressure are lower, it still rains, I suppose.

Chinotto- How much water is there in the Robec?

Kevin- You see, it is a rivulet now...

Chinotto- If it does not rain, in two months' time, there will be no more water. You and all the plants will die. You should go away before all the rivers of northern France, Belgium and Denmark dry up.

Kevin- Where would I go?

Chinotto- To the north of Norway. It has always rained a lot in that part of the world.

Kevin- I don't want to let you die here.

Chinotto- My roots are small: you could transplant me. You would also cut most of my foliage in order to place me in a backpack and carry me easily.

Kevin- We will do that.

Chinotto- Hush, Kevin, there is someone in the kitchen garden.

Kevin turns around quietly and sees a man aged forty, who holds a cudgel.

Kevin- What do you want?

Man- Kill you?

Kevin- What for?

Man- I don't know

Kevin- You kill people for no reason! You must be insane.

Man- They have killed my son; I must avenge myself.

Kevin- You are going to take revenge on a 14-year-old who could be your son! You are a lunatic! There's plenty of food where you are, take some and go away.

The man looks down, picks up a few potatoes, raises his cudgel and rushes over to Kevin, who throws pruning shears at the man's head. He falls to the ground, in front of Chinotto. He has passed out. Kevin grasps the cudgel and hits him once in the head.

Kevin- He could have been my father… I never met my father. I needed one.

Chinotto- Not one of that sort.

Kevin- One who would have taught me how to become a human being.

Chinotto- All the adults of your species failed in this mission, and they compelled you to live in hell.

Kevin- They compelled us to kill them in order to survive.

Chinotto- Where is your mother?

Kevin- I don't know. One day I returned home and she was not there. Perhaps she fled like all the others.

Chinotto- She abandoned you!

Kevin- Nowadays, all parents abandon their children.

Chinotto- I cannot teach you how to become a human being, but I can show you what humanity and reason are, for Nature has bestowed these privileges upon other creatures.

Kevin- It is high time we went away.

Kevin did not bury the corpse. Chinotto pushed it under the periwinkles. The plant did not sing the song of the deceased lonely hearts: when nature is outraged, it grieves in silence.

Part III:
The promised land.

Chapter I:

A wild tangerine tree in a pot.

Kevin is looking at the Robec. The bodies of the two ducks are floating in the water. They most certainly died of hunger. There is almost no current. The lad is holding a small plastic pot and a saw in his hands. He sets them on the ground, takes the cadavers gently and places them in the pot. Then he picks up the saw and heads toward Chinotto's garden. He walks past the dead fruit trees. He had decided not to water them anymore, for he had to save the water. The grass is yellow. All the privacy trees have dried up. The color of what Kevin has not watered is strange; it is so dry that yellow is almost grey.

Kevin- The two ducks died yesterday.

Chinotto- What will you do with the corpses?

Kevin- I don't know.

Chinotto- You could eat them. You need to eat meat: you are carnivorous.

Kevin- They were my friends… I almost did not dare to eat their eggs. I will bury them tonight. Meanwhile, I am going to repot you in this pot.

Chinotto- I have never been in a pot… Cut most of my foliage first.

Kevin- It might be dangerous. I don't want to kill you.

Chinotto- It is not dangerous at all. I can continue living with a few leaves. Most of all, I need to be watered frequently.

Kevin- Will it hurt you.

Chinotto- I am a tangerine tree: my branches are thin. I will hardly feel the pain when you cut them.

Kevin cut back all the branches. The tangerine tree did not utter a single word. Then the lad dug a trench around it in order to see where the roots were.

Chinotto- I don't have a lot of roots, and they are very small.

Kevin- How can I uproot you without hurting you?

Chinotto- It's simple. You just have to hold my trunk and pull it.

Kevin- That's what I am doing… Gosh, they resemble cactuses': there are very few roots. What must I do now?

Chinotto- Put a bit of earth at the bottom of your pot, set me on it, fill the pot with earth and water me.

Kevin- That's done. What must I do next?

Chinotto- Place the pot in the backpack and lift me. Then walk a bit.

…

Kevin- How do you feel up there?

Chinotto- It's a bit weird. I have never been that tall! I am almost like the blackbirds that used to land on me a long time ago.

Kevin- You are not heavy.

Chinotto- Will you be able to carry me to northern Norway?

Kevin- Sure.

Chinotto- Unfortunately, you are not strong enough to carry the other plants.

Kevin- However, I can place one in your pot. Which one do you choose?

Chinotto- Please, Kevin, transplant a periwinkle. I have always been surrounded by periwinkles.

That's what the lad did.

Chinotto- When will we leave?

Kevin- Tomorrow morning.

Chinotto- What is our destination?

Kevin- There is a small village in the north of Norway where it used to rain a lot. That's what is written in my geography book.

Chinotto- What's its name?

Kevin- Skarsvag.

Chinotto- It sounds very exotic… What regions and countries will we cross?

Kevin- I don't know yet. There won't be too many. I will certainly find a small boat in Dieppe, Le Tréport or Le Crotoy. Then I will sail it to northern Norway.

Kevin buried the two ducks, fashioned a cross out of the branches of the pear tree, carved "my two friends" on it, thrust it into the grave and retired to his flat.

Then the sun set. Now Chinotto and the periwinkle were next to the grave of the ducks. They were silent. The dew began to gather on the leaves of the two plants. The moon illumined them. The periwinkle, which was not a talkative plant, broke the silence: it sang the song of the deceased lonely hearts.

Chapter II:

Is it the last journey?

Kevin let Chinotto and the periwinkle bid farewell to their friends. He did not want to witness this heart-rending scene. It was a heart-rending scene indeed. They all knew that most of them were doomed to death. Perhaps the Mediterranean plants would survive, but not the others. The feijoia passed away as Chinotto embraced it. The austere pittosporum Tobira burst into tears. The other periwinkles and the lavenders sobbed. Then all of them bestowed a few seeds upon Kevin. Their children might grow and thrive where they went. The lad offered to water them a lot, but the skies darkened abruptly and it began to rain. The young man carrying Chinotto and the periwinkle waved his hand and left. He passed by the Robec, looked at the sky, cursed his fate and headed for the north.

It took him two full days to reach Dieppe. They did not encounter anybody along the road. There were no more people in this part of the world. Were there survivors elsewhere? The scenery had changed: the green Normandy was a desert now. Kevin kept thinking of the kind of society he would establish if he met other humans.

Chinotto- Kevin, I can see the harbor of Dieppe over there.
Kevin- So can I.
Chinotto- It is not far away.
Kevin- Oh no, it's not.
Chinotto- There are lots of boats.
Kevin- They are big; I will never be able to sail them.
Chinotto- There must be small ones.

The periwinkle pointed a leaf at a ship that was covered with debris. Kevin went aboard it.

Kevin- You are right, periwinkle, this one is smaller and in good shape. It will be easy to clean it and handle it.

Chinotto- Where will you find fresh water and food?

Kevin- Look over there; there's a supermarket.

Chinotto- Have you already handled that kind of thing?

Kevin- No, but it does not seem difficult.

The lad cleaned the boat and raised the mast. Then he went to the supermarket and took lots of food cans and bottles of water. He stored them in the boat. He did not want to set sail immediately. For a week, he sailed it in the bay in order to master the skills of navigation.

On a sunny morning of the month of June, the new Christopher Columbus set sail for the north of the Old World. He did not to find gold, but cold weather and fresh water. He did not turned around to see what he was leaving behind. He looked in front of

him and imagined what he would find in Skarsvag. He was not an explorer who had planned to come back someday, but a desperate climate refugee.

The journey was fine because the wind and the weather were calm. When they reached the shores of Norway, the three of them rejoiced that the land was covered with grass. It meant that it rained a lot there. However, there were no trees. Chinotto told the others that the sheep they could see might have eaten them, which was plausible. They soon arrived at Skarsvag. They marveled at the scenery: there was a spectacular cascade, a lot of grass, some birds, a few sheep and a… hut! Kevin anchored the boat and went ashore.

Chinotto- Kevin, be careful. There might be someone dangerous in the hut.
Kevin- Is there anybody?

A blond-haired girl exists form the small house.

Chinotto- What is it?

Kevin- It's a girl.

Chinotto- Is it dangerous?

Kevin- I don't think so. She is quite small and seems more frightened than you… My name is Kevin. What's yours?

The girl smiles and utters a word.

Chinotto- What did she say?

Kevin- I don't know. I don't speak Norwegian. It might be her name, or hello, or where do you come from, or go away.

Chinotto- It cannot be go away, for she is smiling. Offer her something.

Kevin- I don't have anything but… you!

Chinotto- That's a very good idea: offer her a tangerine tree and a periwinkle.

Kevin approached her slowly and set the plastic pot in front of her. Then he bowed to her. Other times, other manners; if he had leaved during the fourteenth century, he would have kissed her hand. At times I wonder what Adam did when he met Eve in the Garden of Eden. Did he offer her flowers?

Chapter III:

A tangerine tree in full bloom.

The following day, the girl and Kevin planted Chinotto and the periwinkle in front of the pond that collected the water from the cascade. Then Kevin plowed the land around the pond and sowed the seeds which Chinotto's friends had given to him and those he had stored away in order to grow vegetables in his new home. The girl did not understand what he said, but she did understand what he was doing. She even helped him.

Almost all the seeds germinated, and in a few year's time, the fields that surrounded the pond resembled Chinotto's garden. Little by little, the surroundings were even colonized by these plants. If it was not the Garden of Eden, it was certainly the most beautiful place on earth, especially in May, when most of the plants bloomed. The fields were covered

with thousands of colorful flowers. It was magnificent. All the plants but Chinotto bloomed every year. We don't really know why.

Many years elapsed. Almost all these plants fruited. The girl did not. Although Kevin explored the entire peninsula, he never met other humans. When he reached the age of fifteen, he stopped sailing, for he was convinced that he was the last man on earth and that Evelyn was the last woman.

One day, Evelyn died.

Chinotto- I feel sorry for you, Kevin.

Kevin- I am alone now.

Chinotto- You are not alone, for I am your friend and I am alive. Besides, when nature thrives, men are never alone.

Kevin- You may be right, but I lived with another human being… I did not understand all that she said, but I liked her.

Chinotto- You understand all that I say.

Kevin- Not always, for I don't really understand your feelings.

Chinotto- All creatures neither think in the same manner nor share the same feelings. What are you going to do? Will you go to North America in order to look for survivors?

Kevin- No, I won't. I know that I am the last man on earth.

Twenty years later, on a beautiful morning, the ageless Kevin leaned against Chinotto's trunk. All of a sudden, the tangerine tree bloomed, filling the air with an intoxicating scent that enraptured all the plants, which bade farewell to the last man singing:

If Nature bears you, it is also she
Who kills you when your lonely heart
Gives up hope of becoming what
Your volition had ordered you to be.

Life is a labyrinthine adventure

That starts when the living creatures
Are not aware of their natures,
Which must evolve in the near future.

When reason is bestowed on them.
Humanity enraptures them.
The doves of happiness bring a monstrance
In which will be displayed their radiance.

Farewell, Kevin; we will miss you.
May you be happier where you will dwell.
All the plants around the pound wish you well;
Nature will never forget you.